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RELIGION,
LOYALTY, OBEDIENCE to the LAWS,
INDEPENDANCE, PERSONAL SECURITY
JUSTICE, INHERITANCE, PROTECTION of
PROPERTY, INDUSTRY, NATIONAL PROSPERITY
HAPPINESS.

ATHEISM,
REBELION, TREASON, ANARCHY, MURDER,
EQUALITY, MADNESS, CRUELTY, INJUSTICE,
TREACHERY, INGRATITUDE, IDLENESS,
FAMINE, NATIONAL & PRIVATE RUIN,

WHICH IS BEST? MISERY.

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F. A. Hayek in the Age of Postmodernist Tribalism

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Abstract: This paper argues that the postmodern progressive ideology currently dominant in American universities is fundamentally incompatible with Friedrich Hayek’s classical liberal philosophy as articulated in *The Constitution of Liberty*. In Hayek’s view, American institutions, particularly the philosophy and practice of constitutionalism, were an expression of the British tradition of true individualism. As Hayek observed, in the first half of the 20th century European civilization collapsed largely as a result of an intellectual movement that evolved in reaction to the philosophy of individualism. In recent times, America has faced waves of collectivist doctrines that have given rise to a new age of tribalism and a level of political hatred that is antithetical to the liberal ethos. Along with *The Road to Serfdom*, *The Constitution of Liberty* offers the necessary intellectual tools to elaborate an accrued analysis of the nature of these doctrines and the dangers which they pose to America’s classical liberal order.

INTRODUCTION

With the occasion of *The Constitution of Liberty*’s 65th anniversary, a critical analysis of new forms of collectivist ideologies that have emerged in the United States and other parts of the Western World seems as urgent as ever. This paper argues that the postmodern progressive ideology currently dominant in American universities is fundamentally incompatible with Friedrich Hayek’s individualist philosophy, as articulated in *The Constitution of Liberty* and *The Road to Serfdom*. It contends that contemporary progressivism—often associated with “woke culture”—promotes a form of tribalism that poses a threat to individual liberty and to the foundations of Western civilization. The first section of the paper examines the rise of tribalism in the United States. It also introduces key concepts in Hayek’s classical liberalism to illuminate why progressive identitarianism is at odds with the principles underlying the American founding and with the true individualism that Hayek defended. The second section explores the anti-liberal and antirational nature of postmodernism, drawing parallels between its philosophical assumptions and those underpinning the totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century—namely, Nazism and communism. The final section analyzes how postmodernist ideas have become hegemonic within American academia and assesses the implications of this intellectual shift for the future of a free society. Drawing historical parallels with the rise of National Socialism in Germany, the paper argues that Friedrich Hayek’s warning about the central role of ideas and intellectuals in shaping social evolution must not be overlooked if a political order based on individual freedom is to be preserved. Finally, the paper will present some conclusions.

THE RISE OF TRIBALISM IN AMERICA

Friedrich Hayek, dedicated his 1960 magnum opus *The Constitution of Liberty* to the “unknown civilization that is growing in America” (2009a/1960). Hayek had great hopes for the future of the United States and believed that in the coming century it was destined to become the most influential nation in terms of moral ideas (Ebenstein 2003, p. 214). Hayek’s admiration for America was the natural result of his intellectual work which aimed at reformulating and restoring the classical liberal ideas of previous centuries (Gray 1986, pp. 1-2). In Hayek’s view, American institutions, and in particular the philosophy and practice of constitutionalism, were an expression of the British liberal tradition of individual liberty as developed by such thinkers as John Locke, Edmund Burke and Adam Smith. According to the Austrian scholar, the new nation of the United States, in building upon the rights previously enjoyed by the American colonists, gave itself “a constitution of liberty, a constitution that would protect the individual against all arbitrary coercion” (Hayek 2009a/1960, p. 159). Although at first sight the creation of the American constitution might have seemed to be a rationalist enterprise, on closer inspection the innovations it contains can be seen to have emerged “from the application of traditional principles to particular problems or as perceived consequences of general ideas” (Hayek 2009a/1960, p. 160). As Roger Scruton observed, the American Constitution was essentially a document that reflected the very fabric of social life in America with all its traditions and customs (Scruton 2002, p. 39). In Hannah Arendt’s words, what the American founding fathers had in mind was not the overthrow of the old order but a restoration of their “ancient liberties” as Englishmen (Arendt 2006/1963, p. 34).

The British philosophy that inspired the American republic was fundamentally opposed to the French rationalist tradition of “false individualism.” For Hayek, while true individualism was the foundation of a free society, false individualism entailed an abuse of reason that led to collectivism and socialism (Hayek 1946, pp. 10-11). Moreover, while the French rationalist idea of freedom aimed at “constructing a utopia,” the English idea of freedom relied on the spontaneous forces of society as the source of progress (Hayek 2009a/1960, p. 49). At the same time, true individualism was directed against “collectivist theories of society” that pretend to comprehend social wholes, such as “society”, or race and class, as entities which exist “independently of the individuals which compose them” (Hayek 1946, p. 8). In a moral sense, Hayek explained in *The Road to Serfdom*, true individualism entails the respect “for the individual man qua man. That is the recognition of his own views and tastes as supreme in his own sphere...and the belief that it is desirable that men should develop their own individual gifts and bents” (Hayek 2001/1944, p. 14). In Hayek’s view, this individualist philosophy served as the foundation of Western Civilization (ibid.).

There can be little doubt, as Hayek argued, that classical liberalism and its promotion of commerce and capitalism has been a major force for progress and peace among and within nations (Pinker 2011, pp. 287-288). Indeed, economic progress was virtually nonexistent for 300,000 years, making human life a constant struggle to meet basic needs (Susskind 2024, p. 1). Moreover, for most of human history, there was little hope that hard work would improve the conditions of the average person (Susskind 2024, p. 11). It was the capitalist revolution of the 19th century that ushered in an unprecedented age of prosperity, in which people could dream of a better future (Susskind 2024, p. 1). One of the core beliefs underpinning the innovation that defined the Industrial Revolution was individualism. By freeing people from the constraints of collective thought, individualism allowed freedom of speech and thought to flourish. It also facilitated the development of institutions that created the right incentives for individuals to stand out thus stimulating innovation (Mokyr 2017/2016, p. 18). The reason for this is that individualism entails moral egalitarianism without which there can be no respect of all persons regardless of sex, class or race. In the 18th century, the egalitarian ethics led to increasing equality of liberty eventually enabling all people to pursue their goals which paved the way for unprecedented human flourishing. Thus, egalitarian liberalism, -in other words, moral egalitarianism-, was the driving force that caused the modern world (McCloskey 2016, p. xv).

Only individualism, based on the idea of equal dignity, enables liberty, which Hayek understood as “a state where coercion of some by others is reduced as much as possible in society” (Hayek 2009a/1960, p.

11). As James Buchanan pointed out, in a social order based on classical liberalism, individual liberty and individual responsibility, are “ultimate or supreme values that are extended equally to all members of the community” (Buchanan 2008, p. 8). This means that “the classical liberal supports extensions of individual liberty for its own sake” and that “there is no attenuation of responsibility based on some judgment of reduced capacity” (Ibid.).

In the United States, this idea of moral equality as consecrated in the opening lines of the Declaration of Independence put in motion the process of effectively achieving equality before the law for all individuals, regardless of race (Wood 2003, pp. 126-127). Moreover, the classical liberal worldview would become so dominant that in his 1955 classic work, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, Harvard professor Louis Hartz went as far as arguing that Americans had an “irrational attachment” to the ideas of John Locke, making them “indifferent to the challenges of socialism” (1991, p. 6). While Hayek would have agreed with Hartz’s thesis that the United States was the most notable political expression of classical liberalism, he also warned that Americans were not immune to socialism. Already in 1949, he pointed out that the mistaken belief that intellectuals did not have an impact on politics was stronger in the United States than in any other country (Hayek 1949, p. 417). Moreover, for Hayek, a dangerous intellectual evolution had been taking place since the 1930s which was endangering America’s free market institutions (Ibid.). What Hayek had in mind was the experience of the New Deal under President Franklin D. Roosevelt, a program that was inspired in an anti-market ideology then dominant among large groups of economists and intellectuals at universities (Friedman and Friedman, 1990/1980, p. 92). According to some scholars the New Deal had devastating effects on the American economy (Higgs 2006; Cole and Ohanian 2004).

In recent times another aggressive anti-liberal ideology has emerged from within progressive circles undermining the egalitarian ethos defended by Hayek. Like their intellectual predecessors in Europe, this ideology has brought about a regression to dangerous forms of tribalism in America and beyond. Tribalism can be defined as a philosophy that appeals to primitive instincts in order to bind us into collectives through the renunciation of our individual responsibility (Popper 2020/1945, p. 164). As Hayek warned in *The Constitution of Liberty*, the abdication of individual responsibility is rooted in fear and is incompatible with the idea of individual liberty (Hayek 2009a/1960, p. 64). Moreover, according to Hayek, “in a free society there cannot be any collective responsibility of a group as such” (2009a/1960, p. 73). Along the same lines, Hannah Arendt argued that “there is no such thing as collective guilt or collective innocence; guilt and innocence make sense only if applied to individuals” (Arendt 2003, p. 29). Collectivist doctrines that characterize totalitarian ideologies, on the other hand, postulate that the individual is nothing more than an element within the whole, a part of a larger organism with its own transcendent characteristics to which the individual must submit: nation, tribe, class, race, etcetera. In the words of Karl Popper, tribalism emphasizes the importance of the tribe, without which the individual is “nothing at all” (Popper 2020/1945, p. 8). These primitive instincts and emotions, argued Hayek in *The Constitution of Liberty*, have biological roots in our past as nomadic hunters and lie at the heart of the critiques against capitalism, industrialism, and civilized life in general (Hayek 2009a/1960, p. 37). Indeed, our social and moral psychology, honed over tens of thousands of years of evolution to guarantee the survival of the species, drives humans to seek identification with individuals who are similar in order to form groups which act in opposition to other groups (Haidt 2011). As Charles Darwin observed, it is precisely the ability of humans to connect with others in collectives bound by moral rules of fidelity, obedience, and sympathies that facilitate individual sacrifice for the common good that allowed some tribes to eliminate others (Darwin 1871, p. 132). If not kept in check, as Hayek insisted in his last book, *The Fatal Conceit*, tribalism can lead to the destruction of civilization (Hayek 1988, p. 18).

Indeed, like Nazism and communism in the past, the modern identity politics currently espoused by progressive intellectuals fosters exactly the type of attitudes that Hayek viewed as incompatible with the true individualism that sustains a free and civilized society. The historical origins of some forms of identity politics in the United States were the justifiable claims for recognition as expressed, for example, in the 1960s by gays, lesbians, and especially African Americans (Gardels 2018). Originally, these groups,

invoked classical liberal principles of shared dignity in order to achieve equal treatment, not special privileges deriving from their belonging to one particular race, gender, or sexual orientation (Fukuyama 2018, p. 107). The fundamental motivation of these movements was individualistic in the classical liberal sense of the term, not tribal or identitarian (Lilla 2017, p. 9). On the other hand, the current form of identity politics is not a claim for moral equality but an exclusionary “pseudo politics of self-regard” (Lilla 2017, p. 10). It argues that humans are defined by their race, class, gender and sexual preference and that Western civilization is a construction based on systemic discrimination for the benefit of white heterosexual men (Mac Donald 2018, p. 2). In the words of Michael Huemer, the progressive ideology of today mistakenly sees contemporary America as a “deeply unjust society filled with prejudice and systematically designed to harm and oppress” (Huemer 2024, p. 1). Universal values such as equality of opportunity and free speech are denounced as distractions that aim at perpetuating the oppression of minority groups (Mounk 2023, p. 11). Thus, instead of collaboration between individuals, identitarianism fosters a society composed of “warring tribes” that do not enable real moral progress (Mounk 2023, p. 14).

Current progressive identitarianism, also known as “woke culture,”¹ resonates with Carl Schmitt’s views on politics. For Schmitt, who would become the leading jurist of National Socialism in Germany, just as the differentiating element of morality is the distinction between good and evil, in economics between utility and uselessness, and in aesthetics between beauty and ugliness, the defining point of differentiation in politics is the distinction of friend from enemy (Schmitt 2007/1932, pp. 25-26). It is no coincidence that the type of “common enemy” identity politics prevalent today at American universities is the same as that used by the Nazis to achieve their aims in the past (Haidt and Lukianoff 2018, p. 63).

The hatred that modern identity politics triggers among students is reinforced by three intellectual myths that have proven to have devastating consequences by dissociating new generations from the truth. The first is the false idea that “what doesn’t kill you makes you weaker,” the second is the belief that one should always trust one’s feelings, and the third is that life is a conflict between good and evil (Haidt and Lukianoff 2018, p. 4). While the first two myths foster a climate of irrationalism, the third myth encourages dangerous tribal attitudes that pave the way to violent conflict between groups (Haidt and Lukianoff 2018, p. 57). The ideology of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) has decisively contributed to reinforcing the last myth. Its stated aim is to address both current and historical injustices experienced by groups marginalized and oppressed based on characteristics such as race, sex, and sexual orientation by giving them preferential treatment. DEI is therefore philosophically fundamental to identitarian progressive leftism, which holds a dominant position in academia (Porter 2023). According to former dean of Yale Law School Anthony Kronman, DEI has affirmed a tribalism that animates the students “to view themselves as victims and wrongdoers; to act as spokespersons for the racial, ethnic, and other groups to which they belong to; and to believe that they are fatally confined in their loyalties and judgments by characteristics beyond their power to change” (Kronman 2019, p. 17). As a result of DEI, the culture of dignity—which lies at the essence of Hayekian liberalism and the principle of equality of treatment—has been gradually replaced by a “victimhood culture” where victimhood is seen as a virtue. This creates systemic incentives for the people who belong to the “non-dominant” groups to present themselves as such. (Lehmann 2018). As a result, the new pariah, the permanent suspect of immorality, is the heterosexual white male, who can be discriminated against, something which is even celebrated in some cases (Ibid.). At universities, DEI has often been used as a justification for arbitrarily discriminating against those applicants who do not fit the identity profile or the ideological biases of leftist administrators (Huemer 2024, p. 204).

The new forms of racial tribalism have been compared to a “woke” religion that makes rational dialogue impossible (McWhorter 2021, p. 24). For the “woke” ideologues and activists, the totality of the experience of black people for example, entails being exposed to systemic discrimination by whites (McWhorter 2021, p. 5). This would justify special treatment for blacks—and other minorities—including the elimination of standards of achievement and conduct (Ibid.). Moreover, this doctrine of “woke racism” is irrefutable because it views any possible evidence against it as a confirmation of its central postulates (McWhorter 2021, p. 10). In other words, identity politics of this sort has no interest in truth. Its irrational-

ism makes it a form of what Popper called “dogmatic thinking,” an attitude that characterizes primitive people and children (Popper 1962, p. 49).

In this context, the cries for “social justice” by “woke” activists and scholars are nothing more than an effort to dismantle both the ethics of universal egalitarianism and the principle of equality before the law under the pretense of creating more equality through the law. In *The Constitution of Liberty*, Hayek warned against the temptation of trying to make people more equal through the law instead of guaranteeing equality of treatment:

From the fact that people are very different it follows that, if we treat them equally, the result must be inequality in their actual position, and that the only way to place them in an equal position would be to treat them differently. Equality before the law and material equality are therefore not only different but are in conflict with each other; and we can achieve either the one or the other, but not both at the same time. Equality before the law, which freedom requires, leads to material inequality (Hayek 2009a/1960, p. 77).

Hayek went on to argue that “...the state ...should treat all people alike, the desire of making people more alike in their condition cannot be accepted in a free society as a justification for further and discriminatory coercion” (Ibid.). This commitment to equality of treatment or freedom under the law constitutes the essence of Hayek’s efforts in *The Constitution of Liberty*. And it is this fundamental idea that “woke” activists, politicians and scholars are working to undermine as they foster the same sort of tribalistic attitudes and irrationalism that defined the principal totalitarian movements of the last century.

THE REVENGE OF RELATIVISM

Collectivism, as Hayek warned on more than one occasion, is grounded on a false epistemology. Rationalism, for example, implies an “abuse of reason” that leads to scientism, which is to say, the belief that an entire social order can be designed by a human mind. In Hayek’s words, “the rationalist tradition assumes that man was originally endowed with both the intellectual and the moral attributes that enabled him to fashion civilization deliberately” (Hayek, 2009a/1960, p. 54). Inevitably, this form of rationalism entails the demand for absolute power in order to apply to the whole of society the plan that the social planners have devised (Hayek 2001/1944, p. 60). There is, however, a somewhat different yet related epistemological position that Hayek viewed as the foundation of totalitarian ideologies such as Nazism and communism, namely relativism. According to Karl Popper, relativism can be considered “one of the many crimes committed by intellectuals” because it entails a “betrayal of reason and of humanity” (Popper 2000/1994, p. 5). In his 1933 memo to Sir William Beveridge entitled *Nazi Socialism*, Hayek denounced this intellectual crime by explaining that anti-liberalism in Germany was related to the “anti-rational, mystical and romantic sentiment, which has been growing for years among the youth of Germany” (Hayek 2007a, p. 246). Hayek went on to argue that the main intellectual influence behind the anti-rationalism that defined Nazism was Karl Marx:

...it must be said that here again the main influence which destroyed the belief in the universality and unity of human reason was Marx’s teaching of the class-conditioned nature of our thinking, of the difference between bourgeois and proletarian logic, which needed only to be applied to other social groups such as nations or races, to supply the weapon now used against rationalism as such (Hayek, 2007a, p. 246).

Hayek added that it was “obvious that, from this intellectual relativism, which denied the existence of truths which could be recognized independently of race, nation, or class, there was only a step to the position which puts sentiment above rational thinking” (Hayek 2007a, p. 247). Hayek further argued that

anti-liberalism and anti-rationalism were inextricably linked because in order to justify the rule by force by some group, its superiority cannot be demonstrated but must simply be accepted. Thus, irrationalism “leads inevitably to a reign of universal compulsion, to intolerance and the suppression of intellectual freedom” (Ibid.). In other words, given the fact that tolerance can only exist when there is a commitment to the idea of a rational dialogue that aims, even if only imperfectly, at discovering the truth, relativism necessarily leads to totalitarian attitudes. As Hayek warned in *The Road to Serfdom*, for totalitarian ideologies, “the word ‘truth’ itself ceases to have its old meaning” (Hayek 2001/1944, p. 167). For Hayek, this is so because truth no longer describes something to be found based on the evidence; instead, it becomes “something to be laid down by authority, something which has to be believed in the interest of the unity of the organized effort and which may have to be altered as the exigencies of this organized effort require” (Ibid.).

An aggressive form of intellectual relativism of the type that Hayek saw as essential to Nazism and communism is precisely what lies at the heart of current so called “woke” ideologies. As Steven Pinker has argued, the ideals of the Enlightenment and classical liberalism are treated by today’s intellectuals with “indifference, skepticism and sometimes contempt” (Pinker 2018, p. 6). Other scholars have compared the type of ideological corruption that today affects the humanities and the natural sciences to the politicization of sciences that took place under the Soviet and Nazi regimes (Krauss 2020).

The philosophy behind this anti-rationalistic mindset is known as “postmodernism.”²² Because postmodernism denies the existence of objective truth, it denounces the development of knowledge as a mere manifestation of unjust power (Pluckrose and Lindsay 2020, p. 30). If enlightened thinkers—including those of the Scottish enlightenment—held that objective reality could be known to varying degrees, the postmodernists argue that reality is the product of socialization and of our subjective experiences as constructed by language (Pluckrose and Lindsay 2020, p. 30). Although some scholars have claimed that Hayek occasionally approached postmodernism (Burczak 1994), he never denied the existence of objective truth in postmodern terms. Instead, he advocated for a proper use of reason in the pursuit of truth—one that acknowledges our epistemological limitations when dealing with complex phenomena. Thus, Hayek firmly rejected postmodernism and remained committed to a scientific worldview (Caldwell 1994, p. 309).

In the postmodern paradigm, by contrast, the unity of human reason that Hayek regarded as foundational to a liberal order effectively dissolves. Instead, race, gender, sexual orientation, and class are deemed to be categories with their own truths, which are often incompatible and even opposed to the truths of other groups. In this way, says Stephen Hicks, “instead of experience and reason,” postmodernism posits “linguistic social subjectivism” against “individual identity and autonomy,” it postulates “various race, gender, and class group-isms” (Hicks 2004, p. 14). In sum, “instead of [seeing] human interests as fundamentally harmonious and tending toward mutually beneficial interaction,” postmodernism sees only “conflict and oppression” (Ibid.).

Without realizing the insoluble contradiction into which they are falling, postmodern thinkers believe they have discovered the true nature of all societal relations, cultural arrangements, and institutions; a thing exclusively reserved for those who adopt their methods. In this, the postmodernists follow Marx, who also affirmed to have discovered the true, oppressive nature of capitalism, invisible to those who do not adhere to his methodology (Butler 2002, p. 2). Thus, the French postmodernist theorists, generally speaking, worked within a broadly Marxist paradigm (Butler 2002, p. 7).

Ultimately, what postmodern thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard and Jacques Derrida sought was the destruction of the very Western civilization that Hayek fought to preserve. A brief analysis of what their main proponents had to say suffices to prove this point. Lyotard for example wrote that “simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard 1984/1979, p. xxiv). The Enlightenment, in both the French and Scottish traditions, with its search for truth and human progress, would be a meta-narrative or “overarching narrative” which, for Lyotard, must be discarded in order to open a path on to which thousands of other local narratives can emerge, with there being no possible way of establishing that any one of them is truer to another. According to this view, beauty, morality, art, and even science follow an authoritarian logic because all of these categories are

nothing more than linguistic creations, mere narratives bordering on fictions, competing for acceptance (Butler 2002, p. 15). Consequentially, there is no room for the idea that social progress derives from the decentralized knowledge accumulated in the institutions that have evolved from the spontaneous order. Private property, money, liberal moral principles, the family, the market, and all traditions are nothing but manifestations of domination by some privileged groups over others. In the light of postmodern ideology, Hayek's argument that a commitment to principles presupposes a "theory of society" leading to "an understanding of the general forces by which the efforts of society are coordinated" (Hayek 2009a/1960, p. 346) is nothing more than another attempt to legitimize oppression.

Moreover, if everything is narrative and if there is no mechanism for claiming superiority through some reality outside of the subject, then the historical narrative of the West itself becomes a form of self-justification that has no way of defending itself objectively. Even the idea that it is possible to make an objective reconstruction of history on a foundation of collected evidence is nothing more than a fallacy. From this perspective, history is a form of mythology, and its survival depends on whether it is accepted in the process of discussion, nothing more (Butler 2002, p. 33). Thus, everything melts into absolute subjectivism, in the tide of whatsoever the reader believes to be true. Hence, given that access to the past is impossible and the texts in themselves have no significance or message, the reader must deconstruct the text, destroying any imprimatur that the author has placed upon it. In this view, even scientific knowledge becomes suspect. Indeed, postmodernism claims that Western science cannot grasp objective facts or assert superiority over other understandings of reality developed by different cultures at different times. Thus, Western science, with its pretense of objective truth, is nothing but an imperialist narrative aimed at domination (Pinker 2002, p. 198). Medical science, for example, has the goal of enabling the political authority of doctors over their patients, whom they can treat thanks to the power that this discourse confers upon them. Thus, Foucault argued that true power does not consist in what is obliged by force from these processes but rather in what he denounced as micro-power and "extrajudicial coercions":

Traditionally... it was enough to study the judicial structure which determined what was permissible and what was prohibited....In reality it seems to me that the law which differentiates the permissible from the prohibited is nothing more than an instrument of power...highly inadequate and highly unreal and abstract. In particular, power relationships are much more complex... all that is extrajudicial, and all extrajudicial coercion is brought to bear on individuals and runs through the social fabric (Foucault 2012, pp. 41-42).

According to Foucault, "When a psychiatric doctor imposes a confinement, a treatment, a status on an individual," he exercises domination. Thus, power relationships effectively "are those that the apparatus of the state wields over individuals, just as they are those that a father wields over his wife and children, the power wielded by the doctor, the power wielded by the leader, the power that the owner wields over his workers in the factory" (Foucault 2012, pp. 41-42). "Everything," he said, analyzing medicalization, "is profoundly linked to the development of capitalism" that could not "function with a system of political power that is, in a certain way, indifferent to individuals" because of its need to make productive function of all persons by "normalizing" them (Foucault 2012, p. 36). Thus, the Big Brother that George Orwell described in his novel *1984* in reference to socialist totalitarianism would, in reality, be the type of liberal social order defended by Hayek in *The Constitution of Liberty*. From the postmodernist perspective, it is capitalism that created a "precise and concrete vigilance over all individuals," who are now always under surveillance and control by political power, a situation that had never existed before, not even in the days of feudalism (Ibid.). Foucault would even went so far as to say that the people, in order to rebel against all these invisible forms of oppression, had to apply their own justice, without liberal institutions such as the rule of law guaranteed by courts or legal processes, since the existing legal systems were a plot of the bourgeoisie to stave off the vengeance of the masses (Ibid.).

As Roger Scruton observed, Foucault was not interested in truth. In his efforts to demonstrate that there exists an intrinsic connection between the bourgeoisie, the family, paternalism, and authoritarianism, he completely ignored the importance of objective fact. Hence, Scruton suggests, Foucault's entire attempt to unravel the hidden power structures of bourgeois society lacks credibility, becoming instead a "liturgy of denunciation" (Scruton 2015, p. 104).

Like Foucault, Derrida marshaled ideas against language, specifically against what he called "logocentrism," which is the predominance of *logos*, that is, of language and of the reasoning expressed through it, leading to the creation of hierarchies which, in his opinion, must be removed. Continuing Foucault's line of argument, Derrida believed that it is not possible to know the truth through language, since this is in itself a structure created by the person who uses it and, therefore, it is impossible to claim access to an externally existing truth by means of language. His theory of "deconstruction" states that all texts are ambiguous and, as such, there is no single meaning that can be attributed to the written word, but rather there are as many meanings as there are readers. In other words, the doors are open to a complete irrationalism in the sense that it is impossible to claim to have found truth in any text, as there exist multiple truths, which may even be contradictory. And it is thus, according to this argument, that the ideas, interpretations, and sentiments related to a text are neither true nor false (Güney and Güney, p. 222). Derrida himself admitted that his attack was one leveled against the concept of rationality and truth:

The "rationality"—perhaps that word should be abandoned for reasons that will appear at the end of this sentence—which governs a writing thus enlarged and radicalized, no longer issues from a "logos" and inaugurates the destruction, not the demolition but the de-sedimentation, the deconstruction of all the significations that have their source in that of the *logos*. Particularly the signification of *truth*. All of the metaphysical determinations of truth and even the one beyond metaphysical onto-theology that Heidegger reminds us of, are more or less immediately inseparable from the instance of the *logos*, or of a reason thought within the lineage of the *logos*, in whatever sense it is understood...(Derrida 1997/1967, p. 10).

In sum, language is inherently unreliable because words have meaning insofar as they refer to and differ from other words such as, for example: fat and thin, beautiful and ugly, man and woman, superior and inferior, etc. Now, none of these concepts have a direct link with the object they refer to, obesity, beauty, masculinity, and so on; rather, they are part of an entire language system that never makes contact with the real world and, as a consequence, the meaning of what is being discussed is never stable and is always subject to change, even when the same words are used (Güney and Güney, p. 222).

The consequences of this suspicion of language are devastating and for some postmodernism has already "ruined the West" (Pluckrose 2024). This should come as no surprise. If Derrida was correct and we must distance ourselves from logocentrism, then we are unable to claim, for example, that Hayek's liberal philosophy—with its belief that every one of us, every human being, possesses the same dignity and, hence, deserves an equal degree of respect—is in any way superior to communism or fascism. Not even the market can be seen as the best system to favor human flourishing since, as Foucault argued, it is nothing more than a system of oppression. In short, if language is unable to say anything that is true, then all of the effort made by the West toward moral progress is absurd, and we are left utterly adrift, with no philosophical North by which to guide ourselves. Mark Lilla writes:

If deconstruction throws doubt on every political principle of the Western philosophical tradition—Derrida mentions propriety, intentionality, will, liberty, conscience, self-consciousness, the subject, the self, the person, and community—are judgments about political matters still possible? Can one still distinguish rights from wrongs, justice from injustice? Or are these terms, too, so infected with logocentrism that they must be abandoned? (Lilla 2001, p. 179).

In creating an atmosphere loaded with irrationalism, postmodern culture renders all meaningful communication between diverging positions impossible. This makes social life under the rule of law and democracy unviable. As was argued by Harry Frankfurt, no society can be minimally functional without a “robust appreciation of the endlessly protean utility of truth” (Frankfurt 2017, p. 15). It would be impossible, adds Frankfurt, to make decisions and informed judgments regarding the more relevant public issues without sufficient knowledge of the facts (Ibid.). For this reason, Frankfurt’s calls postmodernists “shameless antagonists of common sense” who deny that truth has “any genuinely objective reality at all” (Frankfurt 2017, p. 19).

Along the same lines, Bertrand Russell argued that no society that is spiritually sane tolerates radical subjectivism, as this rapidly leads to irrationality, destroying the idea of community (Russell 2004/1945, pp. 20-21). Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to say, like Frankfurt, that all civilizing endeavors depend on clarity and honesty with which facts can be debated (Frankfurt 2017, p. 16). As Hayek himself argued, civilization and freedom depend on the respect for truth, which is precisely what totalitarian ideologies seek to destroy (Hayek 2001/1944, p. 159).

THE TREASON OF THE INTELLECTUALS

Few thinkers in the last century gave more importance to the role of intellectuals in shaping social evolution than Friedrich Hayek. In *The Constitution of Liberty*, he wrote:

The belief that in the long run it is ideas and therefore the men who give currency to new ideas that govern evolution, and the belief that the individual steps in that process should be governed by a set of coherent conceptions, have long formed a fundamental part of the liberal creed... So far as direct influence on current affairs is concerned, the influence of the political philosopher may be negligible. But when his ideas have become common property, through the work of historians and publicists, teachers and writers, and intellectuals generally, they effectively guide developments (Hayek 2009a/1960, p. 98).

The reason why ideas and ideologies are so influential in human history was explained by Ludwig von Mises. A worldview, explained Mises, is a theory and interpretation of all things, an opinion about the best means to remove uneasiness. Insofar as religion, metaphysics and philosophy provide worldviews, they “advise men how to act” (Mises 1996/1949, p. 178). Ideology, said Mises, is a narrower concept that only includes doctrines concerning the individual’s conduct and social relations. Like a worldview, an ideology is not only a descriptive theory but also a doctrine about what ought to be. For Mises, the outcome of the clash between differing world views, political philosophies, ideologies and ideas is what defines the type of economic organization and institutions a society has. “The genuine history of mankind is the history of ideas. It is ideas that distinguish man from all other beings. Ideas engender social institutions, political changes, technological methods of production, and all that is called economic conditions” (Mises 2007/1957, p. 187).

For Hayek, Germany’s tragedy under the Nazi regime was precisely the end result of an intellectual evolution that paved the way for the abandonment of liberal ideas and the rise of collectivism. In Hayek’s own words, National Socialism was “the culmination of a long evolution of thought, a process in which thinkers who have had great influence far beyond the confines of Germany have taken part” (2001/1944, p. 171). Socialism, insisted Hayek, was not at first a working-class movement but “a construction of theorists, deriving from certain tendencies of abstract thought with which for a long time only the intellectuals were familiar” (1949, p. 417). According to the Austrian professor, “it required long efforts by the intellectuals before the working classes could be persuaded to adopt it as their program” (1949, p. 417).

Apart from Marxism, one of the schools of thought that had played a decisive role in the rise of socialism, observed Hayek, was the German Historical School led by Gustav von Schmoller, who argued that the

state had to be “the leading intelligence, the responsible center of public sentiment, the acme of existing moral and intellectual powers” (Caldwell 2004, p. 53). For Schmoller, “the right man in the right place, the great statesman and reformer, the far-seeing party chief and legislator can here accomplish extraordinary things, not directly, not immediately but through a wise and just transformation of the economic institutions” (Ibid.).

Similar to Nazism and Marxism, one of the central postulates of the Historical School was epistemological relativism. More specifically, the Historical School advanced the idea that there were no universal economic laws. According to Hayek, by denying the existence of general economic laws, the Historical School undermined the necessity of “controlling emotions by difficult reasoning” paving the way for irrationalism (Hayek 1933, p. 125). Moreover, the relativistic position of Schmoller and others had made their school of thought unable of refuting even “the wildest Utopias” (Ibid.). In Hayek’s view, this new class of intellectuals in Germany had a “complete dislike for the practical conclusions of the classical English school” (Hayek 2007b/1983, p. 13).

According to Ludwig von Mises, after the hegemony of Schmoller’s doctrine, “there was no longer any liberal thinker left in Germany” (Mises 2003/1969, p. 13). Like Hayek, Mises argued that Schmoller’s doctrines had made Germany “safe for the ideas, the acceptance of which made popular with the German people all those disastrous policies that resulted in the great catastrophes” including the aggressive imperialism, the hyperinflation of the 1920s and the *Zwangswirtschaft* (or command economy) of the Nazi regime (Ibid.).

But the process of social contagion through collectivist ideas was not a uniquely German phenomena. As Hayek himself explained, in every country that had moved toward socialism, “the phase of the development in which socialism becomes a determining influence on politics” had been preceded “for many years by a period during which socialist ideals governed the thinking of the more active intellectuals” (Hayek 1949, p. 221). Few in interwar Europe foresaw the threat posed by the collectivist virus more clearly than French novelist Julien Benda. In his 1928 work *The Treason of the Intellectuals*, Benda predicted that the agitation of political passions by European thinkers would lead to a catastrophe of epic proportions. As Benda saw the matter, the rejection of reason and the exaltation of identity politics around race, nationality, and class was infecting European society with hatred (Benda 2017/1928, p. 1). Moreover, Benda defined his era as “the age of the intellectual organization of political hatreds,” adding that every political passion was “furnished with a whole network of strongly woven doctrines” that aimed at dividing the world between good and evil (Benda 2017/1928, pp. 14-15). As Hannah Arendt observed, hatred became the driving force of a large part of European political life in the decades prior to the Second World War (Arendt 1985/1951, p. 268). Like Hayek, for Benda, the treason of the intellectuals consisted in abandoning their commitment to the ideas of truth and justice: “the clerks who indulge in this fanaticism betrayed their duty which is precisely to set up a corporation whose sole cult is that of justice and of truth” (Benda 2017/1928, pp. 35-36).

Benda’s prophetic analysis and the Hayek-Mises understanding of Europe’s collapse under collectivism in the past offer valuable lessons in the face of the current postmodern culture at universities. If, as Hayek and Mises argued, German universities had been taken over by thinkers hostile to individual liberty since the second half of the 19th century, the same can be said to have happened in the case of most elite American universities over the past several decades. Harvard University is a case in point. According to the Crimson’s annual survey of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences more than 77 percent of surveyed Harvard faculty identified as either “very liberal” or “liberal” (Hamid and Schisgall 2023). This is consistent with a wider trend that has affected American universities where professors have moved dramatically to the left since the 1990s. The data show that the number of teachers who consider themselves conservative has fallen from just over 20 percent to about 10 percent. Moderates, meanwhile, have dropped from 40 percent to less than 30 percent, while progressive and radical leftists have increased from just over 40 percent to more than 60 percent (Abrams 2016). A 2021 paper argued that the available evidence clearly shows that, generally speaking, university faculty in the United States are not particularly diverse in terms of ideol-

ogy (Whittington 2021, p. 2). Political discrimination may help explain this trend. A 2018 study found that conservative and libertarian law professors appear to experience discrimination based on their political orientation. As a result, legal scholarship has become an “echo chamber,” undermining the education of law students (Phillips 2019). Other studies have identified similar patterns across various academic disciplines (Whittington 2021, p. 6).

Even Finance has developed a clear leftist bias. In the top twenty finance departments in the United States, the average ratio between democrat and republican professors is 4,62:1. Leading universities such as Harvard and New York have a 10:1 ratio of Democrat to Republican professors (Kuvvet 2021). A similar pattern is also observable at the editorial boards of finance journals (Ibid.). Another example of ideological bias is psychology. Research done by José Duarte, Jonathan Haidt and others have noted that almost everyone in the field is on the Left politically. More importantly, academic psychology exhibited considerable political diversity in the past, but it has lost it in the last 50 years (Duarte et al. 2015). This absence of political diversity undermines the validity of social psychological science through mechanisms such as the bias in the questions posed arising from the incorporation of left-wing values and research methods, and can also lead to the avoidance by researchers of certain topics for political reasons (Ibid.).

Other studies have confirmed the lack of intellectual diversity at universities in different areas. After analyzing 7,243 teachers in different universities, one study found that the total ratio of Democrats to Republicans was 11.5:1 (Langbert, Quain and Klein 2016, p. 425). Specifically, the proportions by discipline in the forty institutions analyzed were: economics: 4.5:1; history: 33.5:1; journalism and communications: 20.0:1; law: 8.6:1; and psychology 17.4:1. These data are not irrelevant because, as the authors themselves argued, Democratic academics as a group generally display a lower diversity of opinion than do their Republican colleagues, adopting a harder doctrinal line, usually inclined toward greater state interventionism. In the words of the authors, “Democrats are, often without being very self-aware about it, more deeply enmeshed in bents and mentalities that spell statism than are Republicans, who show more diversity and allow greater place for the classical liberal tendency” (Langbert, Quain and Klein, 2016, p. 427).

A 2020 study of Democrats to Republicans ratio among 12,372 tenured and tenure-track professors in eight academic departments (anthropology-sociology, biology, chemistry, economics, English, mathematics, philosophy, and psychology) confirmed these findings. According to the authors, “the D:R donation ratio favors the Democratic Party in all nine disciplines sampled...For six of the eight or nine disciplines, the D:R donation ratio exceeds 100:1.” The study predicted that this trend was likely to continue because the D:R registration ratio was highest among assistant professors (Langbert and Stevens 2020).

The previous findings are relevant because democrats show lower intellectual diversity and more extremist positions than republicans in a number of relevant socio-political issues (Lüders, et al. 2023). Democrats are also the group that supports progressive identity politics and DEI policies that foster tribalism (Lilla 2017 p. 11). As a result, cancel culture has taken over western universities silencing conservative or right-wing scholars who face a hostile environment toward their worldview (Norris 2021). As Michael Huemer has argued right of center thinkers are a small minority at universities and that in the next decades there is a substantial risk that non leftist voices will be completely eliminated from the academic world making college education “pure ideological brainwashing” (Huemer 2024, p. 205).

Along the same lines, historian Niall Ferguson has warned that the politicization of the university, influenced by ideologies that seek to judge the past according to current standards, has brought about a veritable erasure of any content considered to be “offensive” (Ferguson 2016). Ferguson observed that the Left has sought to colonize universities, schools and departments of education, in order to “send out its missionaries to teach young people a version of events that might make sense in the context of Marxism-Leninism, but is in fact a complete and grotesque misrepresentation of the past” (Ferguson 2018).

And just as in the past when collectivist ideologies grounded in relativism spread from the universities and intellectual spheres to the rest of German society, the doctrine of postmodernism espoused by leftwing scholars has not remained confined to academia. In the words of Yascha Mounk, postmodern identitarianism went from an ideology that was influential “in some corners of campus in 2010 to one that had a firm

grip over some of the world's most powerful foundations and corporations by 2020" (Mounk 2023, p. 98). Moreover, according to Mounk, postmodern identitarian activists and professionals left their universities and took jobs in "prestigious newspapers and well-endowed foundations, in giant corporations and powerful government offices". In these institutions their presence reached critical mass, making it possible for them to "transform the norms, rules, and assumptions that govern them" (Ibid.).

As Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay have pointed out, postmodernism has impregnated all life in general since it first appeared in the 1960s creating "the least tolerant and most authoritarian ideologies that the world has had to deal with since the decline of communism and the collapses of white supremacy and colonialism" (2020, p. 13). The same scholars sum up the reasons why postmodernism is completely at odds with the central postulates of the classical liberal philosophy espoused by Hayek:

Postmodern Theory and liberalism do not merely exist in tension: they are almost directly at odds with one another. Liberalism sees knowledge as something we can learn about reality, more or less objectively; Theory sees knowledge as completely created by humans—stories we tell ourselves, largely in the unwitting service of maintaining our own social standing, privilege, and power.... Liberalism values the individual and universal human values; Theory rejects both in favor of group identity.... Liberalism encourages disagreement and debate as means to getting at the truth; Theory rejects these as ways of reinforcing dominant discourses that suppress certain perspectives [and] promotes the idea that truth is a "language game" Liberalism accepts criticism, even of itself, and is therefore self-correcting; Theory cannot be criticized (Pluckrose and Lindsay, p. 237).

Hayek's insight into the role of ideologies and intellectuals teaches us that, ultimately, the ideas that prevail in society will define its political and institutional evolution. If irrational ideas take over the intellectual spheres and public opinion, a political order of free people cannot survive. If, on the other hand, classical liberal ideas permeate society enough to make it resilient to totalitarian degeneration, individual liberty can have a future. This requires that liberals concentrate on the long-term impact of their ideas and not just on what is politically feasible. As the same Hayek put it: "it is the beliefs which must spread if a free society is to be preserved or restored and not what is practicable at the moment" (Hayek 1980, p. 108).

CONCLUSION

Friedrich Hayek's work *The Constitution of Liberty*, in addition to his best-selling book *The Road to Serfdom*, provides the necessary intellectual tools to identify postmodernism as a threat to America's classical liberal institutions and to Western Civilization at large. Its rampant relativism, its cult of radical subjectivism and tribalism, which it shares with Nazism and communism, make it incompatible with a social order based on true individualism. As Hayek explained, the liberal order cannot be sustained without an appreciation of truth and even less so if the individual is replaced by collectives as the center of political organization. In rejecting truth and moral egalitarianism, postmodernism reduces all social life and human interaction to mere power dynamics between tribes. Consequentially, the spontaneous forces of society that Hayek viewed as crucial for human progress, have no real epistemological value and the market as well as the rule of law can only be seen as mechanisms to reinforce the oppression by privileged groups. Thus, the postmodern formula aims at destroying all the Western institutions and values that Hayek described in *The Constitution of Liberty* in order to liberate those who are supposedly oppressed. Hayek also offered a theoretical framework to prevent such a development. Drawing on lessons from the German experience under National Socialism, Hayek explained that the survival of Western Civilization ultimately depends on the ideas that prevail in society. This means that if freedom is to be preserved today in America and elsewhere, an active engagement by classical liberals in the clash of ideas at all levels of the intellectual and public debate is unavoidable.

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NOTES

- 1 The term “woke” in this context is a euphemism that refers to a set of extreme progressive ideas and attitudes that are incompatible with open debate and rational thinking. Originally, the term “woke” referred to the awareness of social injustices such as racism which current social justice activists claim to be fighting against.
- 2 According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, postmodernism cannot be defined but it can be described as a “set of critical, strategic and rhetorical practices employing concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum, and hyperreality to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning” (Aylesworth 2015).